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Military uprising in Slovakia

The change of political situation in Central Europe after the 1938 Munich Agreement led to the end political opposition, which either went underground or operated from abroad. Both domestic and foreign resistance was gradually formed on the platform of former political parties and the army. This comprised two main streams: civil and communist. The objective of the first stream was to restore Czechoslovakia and the democratisation of the political regime. The second stream was clearly oriented towards the Soviet Union. Foreign resistance was based on the assistance of France and the United Kingdom. The first real assistance was provided by Poland where military troops as Czech and Slovak Legions were formed. After the occupation of Poland by the German army, two centres of resistance arose in France and the United Kingdom. The Czech-Slovak ambassador to Paris, Štefan Osuský and former prime minister of the Czechoslovak Republic Milan Hodža were the first Slovaks to organise the resistance. Slovaks living in France formed special military troops, which fought the German army during its campaign against France. After the fall of France, the centre of resistance was transferred to the United Kingdom where Slovaks joined the exiled Czechoslovak government and President Edvard Beneš. The Czechoslovak army abroad was formed there. Osuský and Hodža parted from Beneš due to his inability to accept basic Slovak requirements for the autonomy of Slovakia in a future Czechoslovak Republic, and due to his orientation towards the Soviet Union. Domestic resistance was developed under relatively favourable conditions in Slovakia, since it wasn't occupied by the German army. Via couriers travelling through neutral states (Switzerland, Turkey), and subsequently using wireless stations, domestic resistance maintained connections with resistance abroad. Former members of the Agrarian Party led by Ján Lichner and after his emigration in 1940 by Ján Ursíny and Jozef Lettrich, were the strongest components of domestic resistance. They pursued the idea of a Czech-Slovak State with a democratic political system and Slovak self-government. The communists led by Ján Osoha accepted the idea of a separate Soviet Slovakia, which would become an integral part of the Soviet Union. Subsequently they were subordinated to instructions from Moscow and stood for the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic as a federation. The first partisan groups formed in the mountains from 1942 based on the initiative of the communists. An oppositional attitude was also assumed by some moderate members of HSL'S, for example Karol Sidor, Karol Klinovský and Martin Sokol. They advocated either an independent Slovakia in a Central European federation, or a Czech-Slovak federation. However, this group was left out of the immediate preparations for the uprising. The Slovak economists I. Karvaš and P. Zat'ko were involved in the resistance, moving supplies of food, clothes and finances to Central Slovakia. Slovak underground groups had the following cover names: Flóra, Justícia, and

..... Demec. When the situation on the Eastern Front turned in favour of the Soviets
..... in 1943 and Italy capitulated the same year, dissatisfaction increased among the
..... German allies. Slovakia was not an exception. A prerequisite for the unification of
..... communist and civil resistance in Slovakia was created as a result of the
..... agreement between Beneš and Stalin. The unified procedure was based on the
..... argument for a combined struggle against Nazism and on building a joint Czech-
..... Slovak state with a democratic political system on the basis of the national
..... equality of Czechs and Slovaks. These principles, on which both streams of
..... resistance agreed, were included in the Christmas Agreement concluded in
..... Bratislava in 1943. The Slovak National Council, a central resistance body, was
..... created on the basis of this agreement. Ján Ursíny, Matej Josko and Jozef Lettrich
..... became its first civil block members. The communist block was represented by
..... Karol Šmidke, Gustáv Husák and Ladislav Novomeský. A military centre was
..... formed within the framework of the Slovak National Council, which prepared a
..... planned military uprising. It was formed in April 1944 at the ground forces
..... headquarters in Banská Bystrica under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Ján
..... Golian. He prepared the uprising plan, in which the Eastern Slovakia army under
..... General Augustín Malár, deployed in the Carpathian mountain pass in Eastern
..... Slovakia, would play the key role.



The mood of Slovaks was tense yet expectant in the coming days. The June 1944 landing of Anglo-American allies in Normandy and Red Army successes in Ukraine were sure signs that Germany's defeat was only a matter of time. The military front was before the Carpathians. The coordination of this action with Soviet military command came late. Moreover, they lacked faith in the prepared uprising, especially the military centre and its officers with links to London. They favoured sending partisan groups to Slovakia. They supported the domestic partisan movement, but with early diversions they focused German attention on Slovakia and endangered the planned uprising. Despite German instructions, the Slovak government lacked the sufficient force and authority to intervene more vigorously against the partisan movement. When partisans occupied Ružomberok, Germany reacted by sending its army to Slovakia. On 29 August, the German army started to occupy strategic points in the Váh River valley, where the majority of military production and important infrastructure lines were concentrated. Two Slovak divisions in the Eastern Carpathians remained without command and were subsequently disarmed by the German army without any resistance, which then occupied a large area of Eastern Slovakia. Hence the opportunity was lost to connect with the Red Army and use the two divisions, without which the uprising had little chance of success. On the evening of 29 August 1944, General Čatloš was forced to greet the German army in a radio address. Lieutenant Colonel Golian issued the password 'Start the evacuation,' which signalled the beginning of organised military resistance against the occupying German army. The town of Banská Bystrica became the uprising's centre, being the base of the Slovak National Council that assumed all power in the uprising area. On 1 September 1944, the Slovak National Council declared the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic and cancelled all discrimination laws of the first Slovak Republic. The



Slovak National Council had two chairmen: Vavro Šrobár, representative of civil resistance, and Karol Šmidke, representative of the communist resistance. During the uprising, two political parties were active: the Communist Party of Slovakia, which absorbed the Social Democratic Party and the Democratic Party comprising civil resistance groups. The communists held decisive positions of power in the uprising area and were more assertive. Illegal national committees took over power at local and district levels, replacing the previous state apparatus. The Slovak government in Bratislava denounced the uprising, considering it a coup d'état initiated by external forces abroad and focused against the Slovak state.



The 1st Czechoslovak army defended the insurrectional territory. It was commanded by J. Golian, who was appointed general by the Slovak National Council. At the beginning of October 1944, command was assumed by General Rudolf Viest. After two mobilisations the insurrectional army numbered 50,000 to 60,000 men. In addition to the army, the 17,000-strong partisan movement played an important role, even in German army-controlled areas. German anti-insurrectional troops numbering 40,000 men were commanded by SS General Gottlob Berger and then SS General Hermann Höfle. The Flying Squads of Hlinka Guard and Slovak Army - Home Defence - helped them. The German troops were better armed with tanks, cannons and aircraft. Whilst the insurrectionists suffered from a lack of both heavy and light arms, they had the advantage of a familiar environment and mountainous terrain.

The insurrectional army expected quick help from the Allies - but it failed to arrive to the extent anticipated. Slovakia was in the operational zone of the Red Army, and Soviet help came by air but was insufficient. The Soviets did not allow the Western Allies to provide military help to insurrectionists. However, at the beginning of September 1944 they started a quickly prepared military offensive through the Carpathians aimed to help the insurrectionists. That happened despite the Eastern Slovakian army being disarmed and the fortified Carpathian mountain passes being tenaciously defended by the Germans. The insurrectionists defended their territory and fought hard in the Malá Fatra Mountains, Rajecká dolina valley, Low Tatras and Kremnické vrchy Mountains. Organised insurrectional resistance was broken after the occupation of Banská Bystrica on 27 October 1944. Part of the insurrectional army retreated to the mountains where it continued combat activities with the partisans. Both insurrection generals Golian and Viest were captured by the Germans at the beginning of November and met a hitherto unknown fate. Hard reprisals against resistance participants started in German-controlled areas. Approximately 4,000 insurrectionists were killed in combat operations and 30,000 were captured. Slovak civilians, Jews and Romani also suffered. The Slovak National Uprising ended with military defeat. But it clearly expressed the idea of leaving Nazi Germany and starting to cooperate with the winning allied coalition. Together with the combat activities by the Yugoslavian resistance movement, the Slovak National Uprising was one of the greatest anti-Nazi military activities in Europe during the Second World War.

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References: